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1. HUMA ABEDIN, FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF TO FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON IS INTERVIEWED ON MSNBC'S "AMERICAN VOICES"

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Body

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SPEAKER: HUMA ABEDIN, FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF TO FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON

ALICIA MENENDEZ, MSNBC HOST: Joining me now in studio, Huma Abedin.

You're the first person I have had in studio post-COVID. So this is really exciting.

HUMA ABEDIN, AUTHOR, 'BOTH/AND': I am very honored to be here in person with you. Thank you for having me.

MENENDEZ: Thank you so much. One of the most talked about people, you did not do a lot of that talking. It was not you we were hearing from. This is you telling your own story.

You've been very clear. You know your son's soon going to have unfettered access to the Internet. He will learn the story as told by other people. What is the biggest misconception that arises from those stories about you?

ABEDIN: Well, for -- for me, the biggest misconception is the fact that if you're a Muslim-American, that there is a big shadow that follows you. And it started in 2012, at least for me personally. I know for a lot of other people like me, Muslims, in America, it's been much harder. But this notion that there's some dark cloud, and that was one of the hardest parts of my -- my professional life.

MENENDEZ: Can you give me an example of the time that was difficult?

ABEDIN: So in 2012, when I was working for the Secretary of State, Michelle Bachman, who was then a member of Congress and several other members of Congress wrote a letter suggesting that because of my background, that I had -- that I was basically not a patriot, that I was giving advice to our Secretary of State that was potentially against the interests of our nation.

And I was not the only Muslim-American accused. It was other senior Muslims in government. And that was a shock to my system, as somebody who is a proud daughter of two immigrants, came to this country, gave up their

lives in Indian Pakistan. Full bright scholars, came here for the American dream, boy did we get it. I spent most of my life growing up in Saudi Arabia.

But my parents took us all over the world. We had that great privilege, to travel and learn about other cultures and places and people. And I think when I walked into the White House at 21 in 1996, bringing that depth and breadth of experience was actually an advantage. It was something that the Clinton administration, my colleagues there, were really curious about. And I think -- I -- I was able to bring a different certain perspective to the table. And it was -- I felt it was always valued.

MENENDEZ: When you say 21, 1996, then that's a baby.

ABEDIN: I was a baby. I -- I walked in, I recount the scenes in the book, walking into the residence for the first time, walking on that red carpet, walking up those marble steps, past the Rose Garden. There is nothing less than awe inspiring.

The first official greeting I did was at 21 for the first woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina. I recount what it felt like to be a brown girl standing in the center of the most powerful house in the world, and representing my country. It was nothing less than incredible.

MENENDEZ: It would be easy to ask what made you so good at this job. But it becomes very clear throughout the book. One of my favorite stories is you asked why you've been chosen for a job. And -- and the person you ask says, Huma, if the First Lady lost a contact, what would you do?

And you said, well I would get down on my hands and knees and I would look for it. And she was like, yes.

ABEDIN: Yes, that's (ph) what it takes.

MENENDEZ: That -- that is what it takes, and -- and throughout the book there is this question of -- of loyalty and the way loyalty becomes one your greatest assets. But I do want to ask you, I think the previous administration articulated for us the limits of loyalty, and the dangers of loyalty. And I wonder where you see that line as existing?

ABEDIN: Well, for me, you know, I opened the book with a note from my dad, that I found after he died.

MENENDEZ: It's one of my favorite parts.

ABEDIN: And it was a commitment's a commitment. If somebody expects something from you, it's why, you know, my father was terminally ill, diagnosed with a terminal illness when I was two. So the way he really raised us from a very young age to live without him, to live in the world, that's why when I was eight, I was calling airlines and asking for flights to Jakarta (ph).

It -- that confidence that he inculcated and my mother, both of them together, I think prepared me when I walked into the White House. So for me, that when I walked in, I wasn't even sure I was a Democrat. I mean, most of my family that lived here were Republicans. But it was a cause. It felt like good, important things were happening.

I mean, this was an administration at the time, you know, the economy was booming. You had in a president actively engaged in the Middle East peace process. A First Lady who was championing women's rights around the world. So it was really about doing the right thing.

My father's mantra that he lived by is do the right thing. And every decision I made in my life was doing the right thing. And loyalty is something I do feel, especially towards Hillary Clinton. She's always been loyal to me. I will always be loyal to her. And -- and that certainly has been tested over the years.

MENENDEZ: I mean, that note is also so strange in its clairvoyance of what you would run into later in your life. It could have been a note that he would have drafted as your marriage was disintegrating, in a very public way. I -- I don't want to ask you about that.

I actually want to ask you a slightly different question which is, 11 days before the 2016 election, the e-mails, the laptop, the interesting part that you write about in the book, you're telling your husband quote, "if she loses this election, it will be because of you and me." How has your thinking evolved on that?

ABEDIN: Yes, and in the moment, you know, I -- I take people back, you know, a lot of the speculation about me in the last two decades has been what is wrong with her and what is she thinking. And it is why the book is long, it is why I share exactly what I was thinking through these periods.

And in that moment, I mean, here we were and the mission was the election, and for her to win. And Anthony and I had obviously gone through all of these incredible trials, thinking that we could somehow affect the election. Yes, it was devastating.

And I took a lot of, you know, work and therapy and getting through to come to the other side. But in that moment, I didn't even feel like I could feel anything because feeling felt selfish. And it was -- it was a horrible -- it was a horrible 10 days as I recount in detail in the book.

MENENDEZ: Who do you blame now?

ABEDIN: I think it is clear that the sitting FBI director at the time, made a decision, unprecedented decision to make public this news that they could have very easily called me and said, either of us, and say can we look through this material. And then for two days before the election, say, oh just kidding, there's nothing here.

The responsibility falls with that institutional leadership there that made that. And I will never understand why they did that when they had somebody like me who volunteered. And I'm giving them whatever they wanted to give. I would have done the right thing. I always try to do the right thing. So that's something I do have to live with.

MENENDEZ: I think there are a lot of people who confuse proximity to power, as actual power. It's very clear. You -- you do not have such confusion.

ABEDIN: I don't.

MENENDEZ: No. What have you learned about the difference between power by proxy and actual power?

ABEDIN: Well, that you -- you can't forget who you are and where you come from. I mean, I -- it's one of the things that I, you know, my father was a plantsman and he would -- every time he planted, it's all about the roots plant. ***Humans are like plants***.

It's all about the roots. And if the roots are strong, you will survive. And I never confused that it -- this was about me. It was always about Hillary. It's one of the reasons I stayed silent Alicia, it's that, it was not my story. It was not my campaign. My job was the staff person that stayed in the background.

I think that helped stayed (ph) -- you know, keep me grounded when things got really bad, because even then -- even that announcement 11 days before the election, I knew it wasn't about me. It was a convenient way to derail my boss. And it -- it was successful.

MENENDEZ: This book is, if nothing else, an ode to female friendship.

ABEDIN: Absolutely.

MENENDEZ: A sustaining factor in your life.

ABEDIN: There is a whole chapter called Hillary Land. And one of the things I talk about is how, you know, Hillary is a club that comes with a lifetime membership. All of these traditions that we have, how are you feeling? See my allergist. I want to take care of you. This culture in Hillary Land is all of these things, because Hillary Clinton is all of these things.

But I also say later in the book how I, for much of my 20s took my friendships, my female friendships for granted. It wasn't until I went through some really hard things in my life, and I think a lot of women might be able to relate, that when you make choices in your relationship, you are judged both by men and women.

And I had taken those relationships for granted that I was never really there for them. That to them, have a whole new group of friends come into my life. It's one of the reasons I talk about Anna Wintour being such an important person in my life because she did that for me.

She gave me the gift of friendship and brought a new circle of friends into my life. And on my lowest days, they are the ones who have been there for me. And I now cherish those friendships. It's -- it's -- it's work but it's work you should -- it's worth investing in.

MENENDEZ: Huma Abedin, thank you so much for being here. Her new book, "Both/And, A Life in Many Worlds" out now. More "American Voices" after this.

END

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: MUSLIM AMERICANS (90%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (89%); MUSLIMS & ISLAM (87%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (78%); WRITERS (77%); RELIGION (72%); COVID CORONAVIRUS (57%)

Industry: WRITERS (77%)

Person: HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON (89%)

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